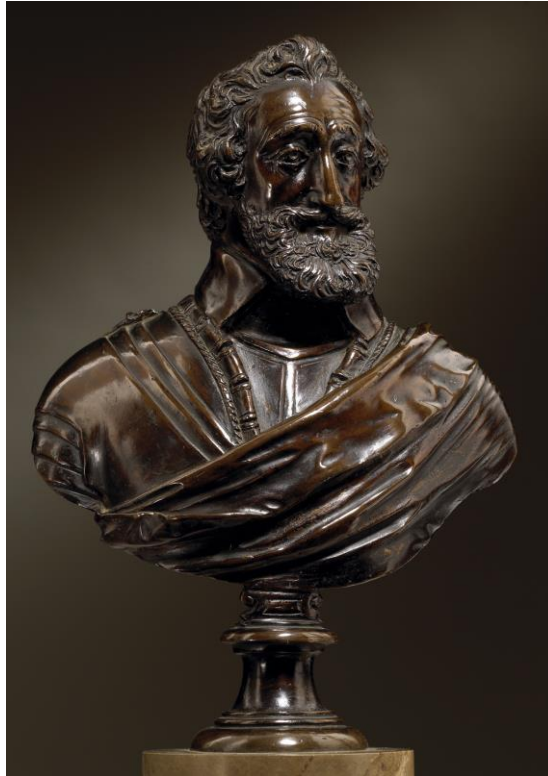


**A Bronze Bust of Henry IV (1553-1610)**

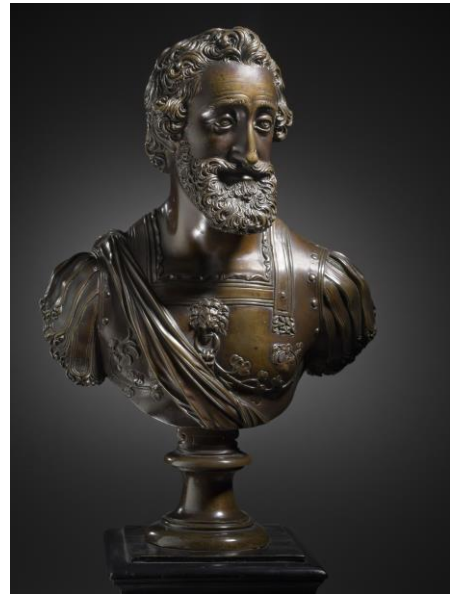
by *Barthélemy Prieur* (1536 – 1611), workshop of  
French bronze, on grey marble base  
First half 17<sup>th</sup> century

H 25.5 cm (H 10 in. - without base)



This fine bronze depicts king Henry IV of France, also known as Henry the Great, the first king of the Bourbon dynasty. The bust, aimed at glorifying the king, shows him wearing a cuirass, emphasizing his achievement as a military genius. Barthélemy Prieur produced several versions of the bust, portraying the king either as a hero with a bare chest or as a great military leader wearing a Roman or contemporary cuirass. These busts were usually accompanied by matching busts of the Queen, Mary de' Medici, either wearing a classical dress or an exquisite court costume. From Prieur's personal post-mortem inventory it is known that he had produced

several small portraits in the form of busts of the king and queen. Today the most famous extant versions are those of the Louvre, the LACMA and the Ashmolean Museum. Henry IV commissioned Prieur to create not only these busts, but had him create a whole series of sculptures, portraying himself and Queen Mary de' Medici as a part of his project to consolidate his power through dissemination of their images. It is known that Prieur often worked in collaboration with his son-in-law, the sculptor and medallist Guillaume Dupré, and it is presumed that the latter assisted Prieur in producing these busts. Prieur and his workshop eventually cast numerous copies of the busts ensuring the envisaged wider circulation of the king's image.



*Bust of Henry IV of France, c. 1600  
Bronze on wood socle, by B. Prieur  
LACMA*

### *Barthélemy Prieur (1536- 1611)*

Barthélemy Prieur was born around 1536 in a family of farmers in Berzieux. Little is known about his early training as a sculptor, but during the 1550s, he reportedly stayed in Rome for a while. From October 1564 to the end of 1567 he served as court sculptor to Duke Emanuel-Philibert of Savoy, in Turin, where he made a now lost model for a huge bronze coat of arms for the main gate of the citadel. After having moved to Paris, he and Martin Lefort were commissioned to prepare three under life-size bronzes of female allegorical figures (now at the Louvre) for the monument for the heart of *Constable Anne de Montmorency*. In 1573 Prieur was engaged by Catherine de' Medici to work on the interior of the Tuileries palace and given a commission by her son Charles IX for three seated bronze figures of the *Mourning Provinces* for a new tomb for the heart of Henry II.

In 1591 Henry IV appointed him as his Court Sculptor and as such he worked on the interior decoration of the *Palais du Louvre*. In 1602 he restored the famous antique statue of *Diana with the Hind* (at Louvre) and at the same time made a bronze cast of it (at Fontainebleau).

From 1609 Prieur and Dupré were commissioned to produce sculptures for the monument for the hearts of Henry IV and Marie de' Medici in the Jesuit church at La Flèche, Sarthe, which was never completed. Of the two over life-size marble statues of *Piety* and *Justice*, the latter survives and can be found at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

# DESMET

## FINE ART

Prieur's numerous small bronzes form an outstanding contribution to French sculpture of the period. Among them are the small equestrian statues of *Henry IV Triumphant over his Enemies*, small busts of *Henry IV* and *Marie de' Medici*, *Henry IV and Marie de' Medici as Jupiter and Juno* as well as statuettes on mythological themes. He also executed a series of genre statuettes: male nudes, as well as figures of seated or standing girls combing or plaiting their hair, washing their feet or trimming their nails. Prieur also excelled in creating small bronzes of animals.

Prieur is considered to be one of the greatest representatives of 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century French sculpture. His works were of outstanding quality and found their way into some of the most renowned art collections. Today his works figure in prominent collections such as those of the Louvre, the Washington National Gallery of Art and the Ashmolean Museum.

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### Website

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